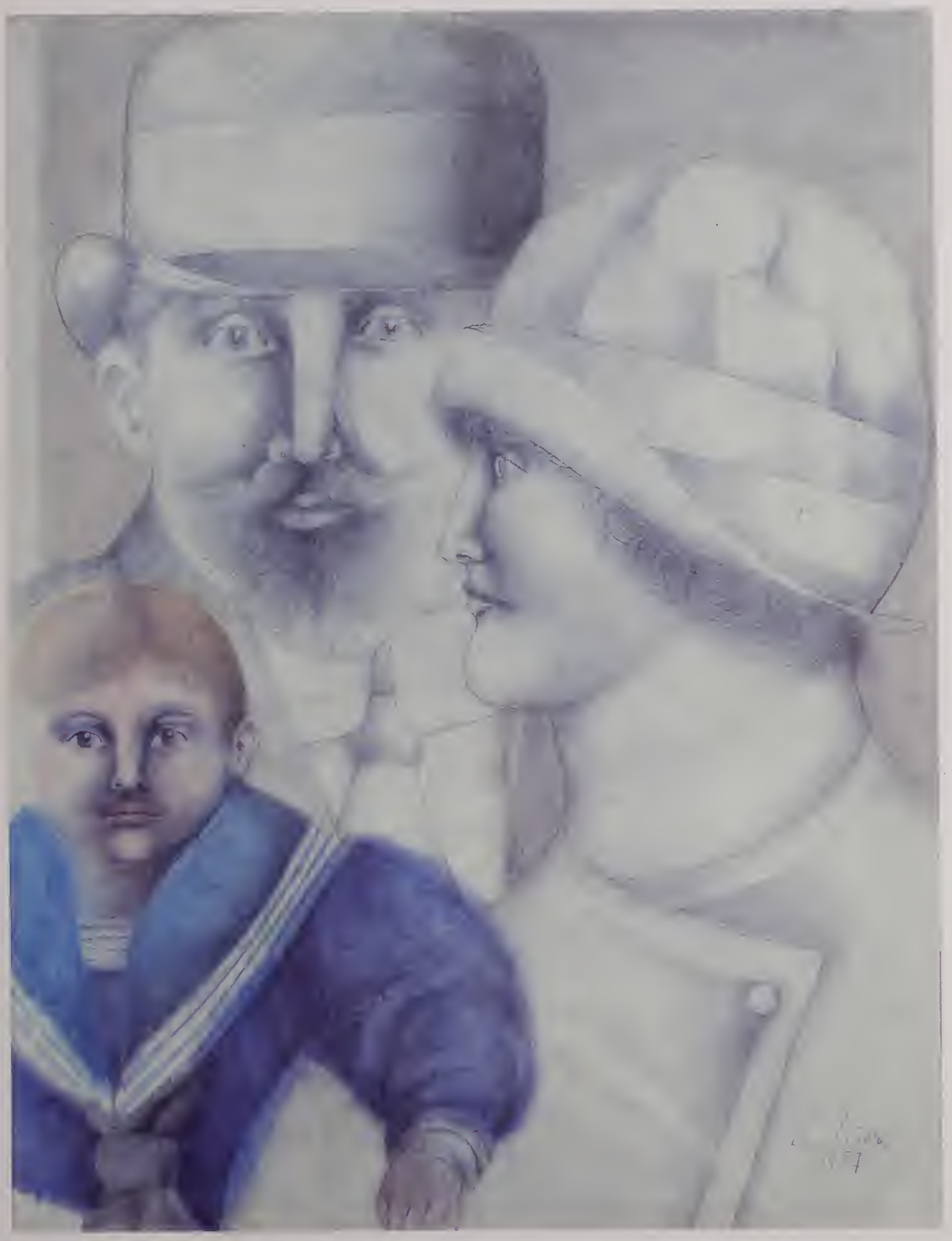
The Changing Likeness



TWENTIETH-CENTURY PORTRAIT DRAWINGS

The works in this exhibition were selected by
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Whitney Museum of American Art

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The Changing Likeness

TWENTIETH-CENTURY PORTRAIT DRAWINGS

Selections from the Permanent Collection of the Whitney Museum of American Art

Whitney Museum of American Art at Philip Morris

June 27–September 4, 1986

The Changing Likeness

TWENTIETH-CENTURY PORTRAIT DRAWINGS

Man's visage has preoccupied him since he first noticed his profile in a shadow or caught his features reflected in a pool—hence, equally as long as the practice of drawing. For many, "Who am I," is answered by, "I am what I look like." Reading the subject's physiognomy through the artist's style commends us to read something of the artist's own nature as well. Portrait drawings, such as these forty, selected from the Permanent Collection of the Whitney Museum of American Art, are less formal than portrait paintings. It is in this casual intimacy—most of these were made as works in themselves, often of friends, and mostly quickly—that we sense the person portrayed as readily as we experience the presence of the artist's hand.

Catching a likeness is a talent. To some artists it is instinctive; others never achieve it. As an attribute it remains desirable. But portrait-making is a discredited profession these days. "The atmosphere of modern art seems to be not altogether favorable to portraiture.... Everything now conspires to make portrait painting or drawing a rare and hazardous enterprise. The art of photography has been as fatal to it as it was to the engravings that used to adorn books," wrote Paul Valéry in *Art and Likeness* (1939). Nevertheless, despite the decadence which he suggests surrounds us, human features continue to provoke the artist in ways either traditional or modern.

"The Changing Likeness: Twentieth-Century Portrait Drawings" presents a diversity of approaches to the subject and in doing so argues that some of these sheets echo graphic traditions long held while others advance very novel considerations. Fictions written, truths revealed or disguised, charm added or neglected, all differentiate the purpose and function of these pages. What then, are the occasions of making such drawings? A commissioned illustration (Cecilia Beaux, Peggy Bacon), documentation of images for paintings or murals (Thomas Hart Benton), mementos of family (Edward Hopper, John Wilde, Thomas Hart Benton), social rites memorialized (John Wilde), the ever-revealing self-portrait (Charles Sheeler, Joseph Stella, Lucas Samaras), imaginative exercises evolved from the model or mind (Rico Lebrun, Federico Castellon, Leonard Baskin), and homages to fellow artists (George Luks, Joseph Stella, David Burliuk). By its nature, portrait-making is conservative, clinging to traditions long abandoned in other modes of visual expression. In these drawings there are only modest hints of the driving forces of twentieth-century art, of Cubism, Surrealism, abstraction, and so forth. Drawn with the usual simple materials, pencil, charcoal, watercolor, or ink on paper, few of these pages are of monumental dimensions. They retain the intimacy of the moment, whether arising from the artist's own needs for self-

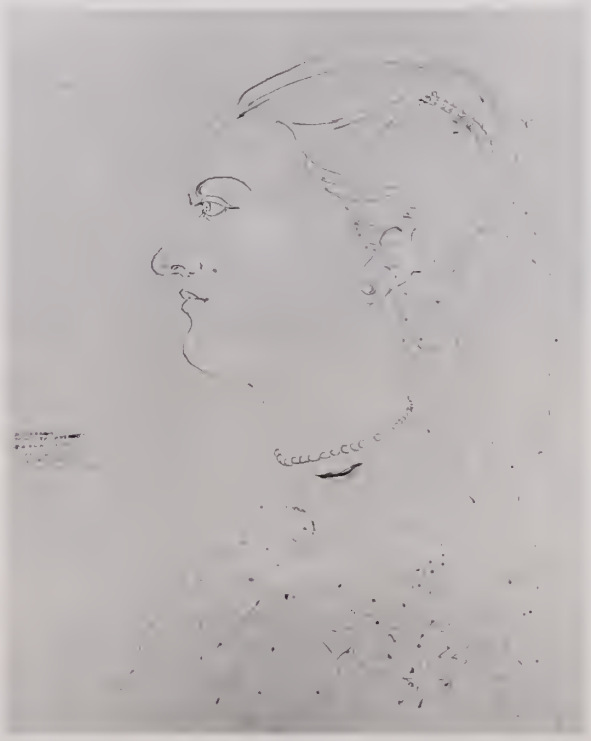
examination or useful documentation, whether an homage to a friend or the conjured image fantasticated upon human features. Appealing warmth or searing discomfort are conveyed through the quality of the lines and tones which constitute the pictures. The same features drawn in other materials in a different style would evoke other responses.

The image's vitality resides in the revealed truths of the subject. A simple sketch of a single person may easily evoke a narrative situation. Questions of identification, observations on the position of the pose and costume, and the play of light engage our interest. Profile, forward, or three-quarter views disclose in differing degrees the spirit of the subject. When filling the page it may project outward as if to greet the viewer, while if delicately drawn, isolated in a large space, it may be read as a loss of potential intimacy. Does the drawing reveal the use of a photograph as recognized in an airless, flat, monocular definition of features? Is it a caricature or cartoon? How much editorializing is the artist engaging in, or does he present the subject with the closest obtainable visual truth? Do we sense the subject's personality, or does the artist's flair for style stand between us and the subject? Should we not therefore be aware of style's great effect on our judgment?

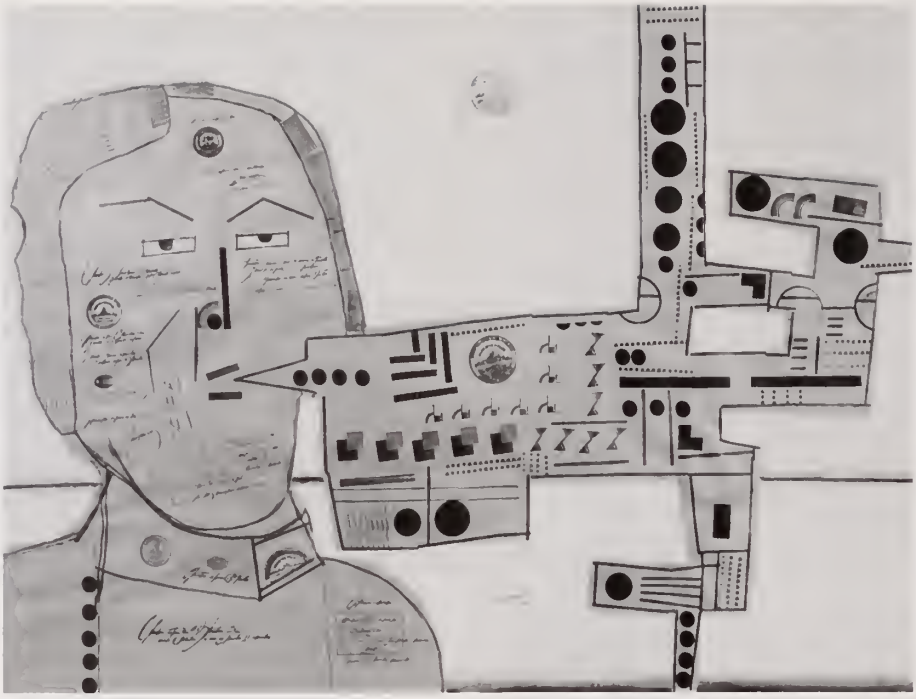
The examination of individual drawings offers responses to these many questions, thereby enhancing our experience of them. Cecilia Beaux, in the portrait of Jan Kubelik, the violin virtuoso, commissioned by *The Century Magazine,* employs charcoal to produce large indefinite areas of atmospheric gray, which are defined by enveloping lines or sharp edges produced by an eraser or stump. The thoughtful expression on his youthful face is augmented by this hazy romantic atmosphere. In bold contrast is the rapidly applied, compacted hatching in George Luks' portrait of *Maurice Prendergast.* An accomplished illustrator, Luks uses a quick sketch method with great force in portraying his fellow artist as a middle-aged man whose dark, recessed eyes suggest rather than report, as in the Beaux drawing. Prendergast is shown as a man haunted by visions instead of being gifted with the performer's friendly outgoing nature. In *Young Girl,* John Singer Sargent drew rapidly, building layers of lines and relying on the light tone of the paper to set the form, which he defines by condensed hatching and the occasional smudge to shape the turn of the neck or cheek. He has caught in a fleeting gesture the sensuality of this young lady of good breeding.

The fully developed virtuoso draftsmanship of Joseph Stella is exemplified in two early drawings: *Boy with Bagpipe* and *Louis Eilshemius,* drawn approximately a decade apart. These sheets reveal his breathtaking

George Luks
Maurice Prendergast, c. 1904



John D. Graham
Mona Anna Uxor de Adolfo Ravenato, 1947



Saul Steinberg
Perry in Japan, 1969

skills and the training he received based on nineteenth-century Italian drawing traditions. *Boy with Bagpipe* is a carefully balanced tonal image stressing the musician's facial features by surrounding it with the coarsely drawn pipe and other elements. The subject's quick glance reveals that he is aware of modeling for an audience. Line is subservient to the abstracted planes and tonal construction of his costume, hair, flesh, and background. *Louis Eilshemius,* delineated with equal care, shows a greater concern in depicting the subject's personality. By modeling the hair into a mass of tone, Stella stresses the profile with its meticulously defined shapes that encourage us to consider the artist's personality. Each line or mark of these two sheets is so charged with thoughtful decisions that we accept Stella's point of view on both subjects.

Two drawings that reveal contrasting approaches to the delineation of features are the Charles Sheeler *Self-Portrait* and *My Violin Teacher* by Theodore Roszak. Sheeler depicts himself in a bald frontal view lacking any romantic pretense, with the same unflinching eye that composed his photographs. The arid space suggests that a photograph might have served as a model in lieu of the mirror. The Roszak drawing participates in traditions similar to those evident in the earliest Stella page. The closely rendered tonal values accrue to establish a monolithic form, proclaiming the extraordinary talent and skill of the eighteen-year-old artist. The light falling across the face clearly represents a gaze that is not so different from that of Eilshemius, a man also lost in his own world of thought.

Since the late nineteenth century, commercial illustration has effected a curious, if not pernicious influence on the American fine arts. For decades this skilled practical craft was confused with the inventive nature of the fine arts. This lack of discrimination, augmented by the illustrator's popular fame, gave commercial illustrations undue authority. Often gifted with great and educable skills, the illustrators nevertheless remain manipulators of others' graphic inventions.

An example of this influence is seen in the drawing by Reginald Marsh, picturing himself in a drawing class in *Sketch of Académie de la Grande Chaumière.* By placing himself at the top of a pyramidal composition and stressing his own image in a refined delineation of darker lines, he focuses our eyes on what seems pompously important. Thomas Hart Benton, too, responded to the illustrators', if not the cartoonists', traditions. The coarse, linear style of *Portrait of J. T. Morton* stands in contrast to the delicate character of the lines in the drawing of Benton's son *(Portrait of a Boy),* a study for a vignette in his mural *America Today.* A prolific draftsman, Benton always felt the need to draw each each of the elements appearing in his murals or paintings. It is therefore unusual that he paid so little attention to the development of his skills in

these thousands of sheets, thinking of drawing only as a method of recording useful data. Also active as an illustrator, Peggy Bacon drew Fiorello La Guardia with an assertive presence. This drawing was worked up from a series of quick sketches made from life in the busy mayor's office. She conveys a sense of his personality and something of her own biting wit as one of America's best satirists.

Fanciful portraits often reveal the artist's bemused imagination. In the untitled page by Federico Castellon, he draws a figure in light out of the paper's darkness. He also establishes contradictory evidence for the nature of the person depicted: the suggestion of realism for the head is countered by hirsute features that imply a creature of mythology or fantasy. He might well have found some inspiration for his subject in the work of his fellow Spaniard Dali, who produced a series of designs with similar images for Schiaparelli in 1935-36. The extrapolation from observed reality into a marvelous or novel image can be noted in the John D. Graham drawing of Anna Saportte *(Mona Anna Uxor de Adolfo Ravenato),* who is depicted as a creature endowed with the trappings of courtly life enhanced with the mystical symbols which were of great importance to Graham in later years. Once a champion of modernism, he rejected it, turning to a vocabulary of arcane signifiers and a style which he felt resembled that of the Renaissance. Yet a comparison with the Arshile Gorky drawing reveals that Graham remained, at least in many of his drawings, very contemporary. Kuniyoshi's *Juggler,* a searing mask-portrait in stark black and white, is all the more bitter for depicting what is usually a circus figure of fun.

Another opportunity for comparison is occasioned by the two sets of drawings of artists and their wives. The John Wilde *Wedding Portrait* panels are decorated with texts, mathematical references, architectural and landscape fragments. The obsessive nature of his method, accumulating minute marks into nearly unbroken tonal areas, reveals his interest in a Northern European tradition exemplified by the drawings of Albrecht Dürer or Lucas Cranach. A meticulous realist, Wilde strives to reconstruct objects on the page in a clear light which also reveals the highest aspects of his technique. In harsh contrast are the blunt musings of Edward Hopper. The awkwardness demonstrated in his handling of the material registers as much about the man as his style comments on the subjects. A matter-of-factness which decrys elegant rendering is a facet of the pragmatic realism also observed in the Sheeler portrait. Hopper follows a tradition used by Luks that reaches back to Forain or Manet, though he has neither the command of materials, nor the psychological insights of his French predecessors. The

Federico Castellon
Untitled, 1937

drawing of his wife, Jo, while softer in tone than his *Self-Portrait,* becomes coherent through the same plain touch.

Richard Lindner has drawn the only page in the selection that depicts a family and it is probably based on a photograph. Lindner collected toys, puppets, and curious objects which often served as the source for the mechanical nature with which he imbues his subjects. A careful psychological study of three individuals, echoing, but abstracted from each other, can be read in this carefully composed page. The imagination's ambition is arguably exotic in the Samaras self-portrait *(Large Drawing #39),* which incorporates X-rays of the artist's skull. It is a vision of the future proferred during his lifetime. Samaras' intelligent and irritating observations suggest that man must know even that which life prevents him from knowing.

Two styles, as ostensibly disparate as those of Will Barnet and Chuck Close, on examination reveal a related rationale of ritual abstraction. In Barnet's *Study for Introspection (5733),* each element is carefully defined within an all-over pattern; it is not therefore essentially different in spirit from the grid system and fingerprint method of Close. The Barnet, probably drawn initially from life and carefully elaborated over a period of time, still evidences a human warmth, while Close's *Phil/Fingerprint II,* which is composed from a photograph, reveals the distance evoked by its source. Close is concerned with mark-making systems. By reconstructing a familiar image (he has employed this same photograph in other works), he is able to concentrate on the correct evaluation of the tints of gray obtainable from the ink rather than on revealing new information concerning the sitter. It is the artist who is the subject here, his mind, his act, his mark, and his intellectual reconstruction of the image.

Considering the human image, however transformed, abstracted, mythologized, whether clearly stated in refined Neoclassic lines or emotionally attacked in a flurry of gritty expressionist marks, remains a natural impulse. In the four generations examined in this exhibition, we note variety in the styles that rise and fall, enrich or decay. The portrait remains the mirror to our times as it has so long to other times. These captured likenesses evoke other days and adventures, clinging to memories of moments past. The memento of a person is also a socio-cultural signifier, a sign of the individual's importance, a finger pointed through history to a never-to-be-known audience saying, "I passed this way."

PAUL CUMMINGS
Adjunct Curator, Drawings
Whitney Museum of American Art

Ed Paschke
His and Hers, 1977

Checklist

Dimensions are in inches; height precedes width. Sight refers to measurements taken within the frame or mat opening.

Peggy Bacon (b. 1895)

La Guardia, c. 1934
Charcoal on paper, 15⅝ x 13½ (irregular)
Purchase, with funds from the Drawing Committee 84.45

Will Barnet (b. 1911)

Study for Introspection (5733), 1972
Pencil on paper, 24 x 32¼ (sight)
Gift of Mrs. Jacob M. Kaplan 76.37

Leonard Baskin (b. 1922)

Tormented Man, 1956
Ink on paper, 39½ x 26½
Purchase, with funds from the Living Arts Foundation Fund, Inc. 57.52

Cecilia Beaux (1863–1942)

Portrait of Knbelik, 1902–03
Charcoal on paper, 18 x 14
Gift of Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney 31.485

Thomas Hart Benton (1889–1975)

Portrait of J. T. Morton, 1928
Ink on paper, 11½ x 8½ (sight)
Gift of Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney 31.494

Portrait of a Boy, n.d.
Pencil and crayon on paper, 10 x 8 (sight)
Gift of Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney 31.493

Albert Bloch (1882–1961)

Untitled (Young Man), n.d.
Charcoal pencil on paper, 13⅝ x 10⅝
Blanche A. Haberman Bequest 69.41

Adolphe Borie (1887–1934)

Peter, c. 1919
Charcoal on paper, 10 x 6 (sight)
Purchase 35.14

Bryon Browne (1907–1961)

Woman with Hairbow, 1937
Pencil on paper, 12 x 9
Gift of an anonymous donor 77.4

David Burliuk (1882–1967)

Portrait of Arshile Gorky, 1930
Ink and watercolor on paper, 14 x 10¼ (sight)
Gift of Paul Magriel 65.87

Federico Castellon (1914–1971)

Untitled, 1937
White ink on black paper, 13⅛ x 10⅛
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Benjamin Weiss 78.37

Chuck Close (b. 1940)

Phil/Fingerprint II, 1978
Stamp-pad ink and pencil on paper, 29¾ x 22¼
Purchase, with funds from Peggy and Richard Danziger 78.55

Philip Evergood (1901–1973)

Self-Portrait No. 1, 1962
Watercolor and charcoal on paper, 24¾ x 19⅛
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Irving Richardson 74.92

Arshile Gorky (1904–1948)

Portrait of Bart van der Schelling, c. 1939
Ink on paper napkin, 15⅞ x 13 (sight)
Gift of Dr. Aron Krich 79.48

John D. Graham (1881–1961)

Mona Anna Uxor de Adolfo Ravenato, 1947
Ink, pencil, and chalk on paper, 22¼ x 17⅝
Purchase, with funds from the Friends of the Whitney Museum of American Art 60.65

Edward Hopper (1882–1967)

Self-Portrait, 1945
Conté on paper, 22⅛ x 15
Josephine N. Hopper Bequest 70.336

Jo Hopper, 1945–50
Charcoal on paper, 18 x 15½
Josephine N. Hopper Bequest 70.288

Alex Katz (b. 1927)

2:30 II, 1973
Pencil on paper, 24½ x 33½
Purchase, with funds from the Neysa McMein Purchase Award 73.73

Yasuo Kuniyoshi (1889–1953)

Juggler, 1952
Ink on cardboard, 22 x 28 (sight)
Purchase 53.37

Gaston Lachaise (1882–1935)

Head of a Woman, 1922–32
Pencil on paper, 19⅝ x 14⅜ (sight)
Purchase 38.43

Rico Lebrun (1900–1964)

Man in Helmet, 1949
Ink and casein on paper, 24¼ x 18½ (sight)
Purchase 52.24

Richard Lindner (1901–1978)

Sunday Afternoon, 1954
Pencil and watercolor on paper, 25 x 19
Purchase, with funds from the Friends of the Whitney Museum of American Art 60.3

George Luks (1867–1933)

Maurice Prendergast, c. 1904
Pencil on paper, 10 x 6¾
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Edward W. Root 42.38

Reginald Marsh (1898–1954)

Sketch of Académie de la Grande Chaumière, 1926
Charcoal on paper, 9¾ x 13¾
Felicia Meyer Marsh Bequest 80.31.60

Elie Nadelman (1882–1946)

Head of Woman with Hat, c. 1923–25
Graphite on tracing vellum, 16½ x 10¾
Purchase, with funds from the The Lily Auchincloss Foundation, Vivian Horan, The List Purchase Fund, the Neysa McMein Purchase Award, Mr. and Mrs. William A. Marsteller, the Richard and Dorothy Rodgers Fund, and the Drawing Committee 83.34

Ed Paschke (b. 1939)

His and Hers, 1977
Graphite, colored ink, and colored pencil on paper, 29 x 23⅛
Purchase, with funds from the Drawing Committee 84.46

Theodore Roszak (1907–1981)

My Violin Teacher, 1925
Charcoal on paper, 21¼ x 16½
Gift of the Theodore Roszak Estate 82.33.4

Portrait (The Artist's Wife), 1951
India ink and colored ink on paper, 33½ x 29 (irregular)
Gift of Sara Jane Roszak 83.33.7

Lucas Samaras (b. 1936)

Large Drawing #39, 1966
Colored pencil and graphite on paper, 16¾ x 14
Gift of Howard and Jean Lipman 80.37.3

John Singer Sargent (1856–1925)

Young Girl, n.d.
Pencil on paper, 13½ x 9 (sight)
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Raymond J. Horowitz 72.151

Charles Sheeler (1883–1965)

Self-Portrait, c. 1924
Pastel and charcoal on paper mounted on cardboard, 24 x 20⅛
Purchase, with funds from the Mr. and Mrs. M. Anthony Fisher Purchase Fund and The Martin and Agneta Gruss Foundation 82.36

Saul Steinberg (b. 1914)

Perry in Japan, 1969
Ink, gouache, acrylic, and collage on paper, 28¾ x 38⅞ (sight)
50th Anniversary Gift of the Friends of the Whitney Museum of American Art and the National Endowment for the Arts 80.9

Joseph Stella (1887–1946)

Boy with Bagpipe, 1910–12
Charcoal, pastel, and pencil on paper, 21 x 16 (sight)
Promised 50th Anniversary Gift of Lucille and Walter Fillin P.19.80

Louis Eilshemius, n.d.
Pencil on paper, 28⅜ x 21⅝ (sight)
Gift of Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney 31.581

Self-Portrait, 1940–42
Graphite and colored pencil on paper, 16½ x 11
Gift of Aaron Cohen in memory of Tricia Karlis Cohen 79.72

Andy Warhol (b. 1925)

Ginger Rogers, 1962
Graphite on paper, 23¾ x 18
Purchase, with funds from the Lauder Foundation-Drawing Fund 79.29

Charles White (1918–1979)

Preacher, 1952
Ink on cardboard, 21⅜ x 29⅜ (sight)
Purchase 52.25

John Wilde (b. 1919)

Wedding Portrait, 1943
Pencil on paper, 27¾ x 17¾
Gift of the artist in memory of Helen Wilde 70.74

Wedding Portrait, 1943
Pencil on paper, 27¾ x 17¼
Gift of the artist in memory of Helen Wilde 70.75

Karl Wirsum (b. 1939)

Study for Doggerel II, 1966
Crayon on paper, 14 x 11
Gift of Marjorie Dell 68.63

Cover:
Richard Lindner
Sunday Afternoon, 1954

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